

Folsom breaks Senate filibuster

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MONTGOMERY | Over the vociferous objections of Republican senators, Lt. Gov. Jim Folsom on Tuesday helped break a GOP-led Senate filibuster that had threatened passage of the state budgets.

"This is an illegal vote. You cannot violate the law," Sen. Larry Dixon, R-Montgomery, shouted at Folsom.

With Folsom's help, the Senate's Democratic majority quickly killed two bills that the minority coalition of senators had been holding up, then took the procedural steps needed to put the state budgets and public employees' pay raises in line for passage in the closing days of the legislative session.

Folsom defended his action.

"It is the paramount duty of the body to pass budgets. The people of Alabama are watching," he said.

State Sen. Phil Poole, D-Tuscaloosa, said the controversial ruling was correct because it means the state budgets can be passed.

Poole said Folsom's action was an attempt to counter some of Republican Gov. Bob Riley's use of state money, including a proposed \$1.052 billion school bond issue, at the same time senators are losing their small legislative discretionary grants.

"There are hundreds of millions of dollars in the governor's office, and the highway department has a billion dollars a year," Poole said. "What all the Einsteins in the editorial pages across the state are writing about is peanuts compared to the highway department and colleges and school college authority the governor has authority over."

Protesting senators charged Folsom with violating the rules and state law by using a parliamentary move to end a filibuster by the minority of 17 senators angered over Senate operating rules that were passed by the 18 majority senators.

"You, Mr. President, are one of the smartest lieutenant governors or the dumbest, I'm not sure," said Sen. Charles Bishop, R-Arley. "You told us in the beginning you'd follow the rules, and now you changed your mind and totally ignored the rules of the Senate and you're making up the rules as you go."

Other senators, however, praised Folsom, the presiding officer of the Senate, for unblocking the filibuster. "I'm proud of the lieutenant governor for breaking through the rules," said Sen. Roger Bedford, D-Russellville.

Sen. Hank Erwin, R-Montevallo, likened Folsom to a referee who is called on by the losing team to override the rulebook. "I don't know how you could ever bring a student in here and say you play by the rules ... when we don't care what the rule book says," Erwin said.

Since shortly after the legislative session began March 6, the Senate's minority of 12 Republican senators and five dissident Democrats has been delaying action to protest Senate operating rules and committee appointments they say reduce the minority's influence and to protest their lack of input in shaping the state budgets.

The 17 senators had been refusing to help cast the votes needed to continue the Board of Examiners of Landscape Architects and the State Board of Licensure for Professional Engineers and Land Surveyors. The bills were indefinitely postponed, moving them off the table and allowing the majority to move the budgets into committees for Wednesday consideration.

Folsom's ruling theoretically kills the two state agencies that "sunset" at the end of the fiscal year, said Sen. Lowell Barron, D-Fyffe.

Senators said movement on the budgets, which were received from the House and assigned to Senate committees, could mean there won't be a need for a special session.

Material from The Associated Press was used in this report.